



INTERVIEW



GENDER

Interview with the author of 'Closing the Gap': Allerd Stikker

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Why did you decide to write this book?

Because during my career I felt increasingly uncomfortable with the male attitudes and language in the business world. Later on I discovered that there must be a link between priorities on economical versus ecological considerations, and a tendency to prefer male over female qualities. I was curious why it was so and how it came about in human society.

Who will find your book interesting?

People who feel that there is something wrong with the perception of male and female in their daily lives, who want to know why, but who haven't got the time to investigate the reasons. This book offers them a non-academic but very revealing overview of the origins of these perceptions through the history of gender relations, up to now.

What is your conclusion from the research?

My conclusion is that there are clear differences between women and men, both biologically and culturally, but that through erroneous assumptions and social misconceptions these differences have been exaggerated and transformed into radical distinctions. We must and we can rediscover the humanity of each person, instead of defining him or her in terms of the male and female stereotypes.

What does this mean for people today?

It means that women and men should and can get rid of their uncomfortable straightjackets and become free from historically determined roles that do not fit their characters and ambitions. They can become sensitive to their genuine intuitions and inspirations, not influenced by whether they behave according to the traditional female or male image.

What does this mean for society and specifically for the business world?

It will open up career opportunities for women and men that are not influenced by assumptions based on discriminative attitudes in today's still male-dominated institutions. It will redress the waste of female talent that prevails in these institutions.

What is your vision of the future?

I strongly believe that we, in the Western world, have entered an irreversible process where more and more women will participate in the shaping of the institutions of the future, including business. In the past, female decision-makers were always in a small minority. But once institutions and corporations achieve 20% female participation at the managerial level, there will be a better and enduring balance of female and male qualities in decisionmaking, including decisions involving the economy and ecology. The 20% figure is based on practical experience - it's a level at which minorities can gain influence in institutional settings. A 50/50 balance is not necessary and will also not happen in the real world, where many women will choose not to pursue full-time careers.

How can your book be of use to institutions and companies?

The book offers an in-depth insight into the background of female/male relationships. Understanding the history of these relationships is essential in order to arrive at the correct analysis of present erroneous assumptions, and to achieve changes in attitude and mindset towards more balanced, more effective and more profitable decision making.

What do you base your optimistic views on, given the disappointing experiences in the past?

I think that for the first time in Western history, as the 21st century progresses, the clout of women in the different sectors of society, be it government, parliament, municipalities, social institutions, universities or business, will be, albeit slowly, reaching levels of between 10 and 50%, depending on the sector. These levels cannot be ignored or eliminated any more, as was always the case in the last 5000 years of human history.

Why is the percentage of women in top management in the Western World still so low, between 5 and 10%?

We must remember that it is only in the past 15 years that women have deliberately chosen to climb the corporate ladder, but how long does it take to reach the top ranks in corporations? I would say an average of 25 years. So just wait, they are coming in the next decades! Besides, we focus too much on large corporations. In smaller businesses, women have already exceeded 20% of the executive positions, either because they have started the business themselves, or because the promotion route is shorter.